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Egypt: What happens when a young woman from a traditional Muslim family becomes pregnant by a young man who is not accepted by the family; whether abortion is a solution; situation of children born outside a marriage
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

The following information was provided in a 22 January 2007 telephone interview with the Director of the Egyptian Center for Women's Rights (ECWR), a non-governmental organization (NGO) that is committed to confronting discrimination against women and to improving the legal and political status of women (n.d.). The consequences for a young woman from a traditional Muslim family who becomes pregnant vary from region to region. For example, southern Egypt is more conservative and such a situation would be considered extremely problematic: the family could even go so far as to kill the young woman and the father of the unborn child.

In northern Egypt - Cairo, for example - the consequences would depend on the situation: the parents of the young woman could ask the young man to marry their daughter and, if he refused, have the child aborted. However, the Director of the ECWR explained that if the pregnancy is too advanced for an abortion, there are two options: the child could be registered at birth under the young woman's family name and be raised as the young woman's brother or sister, or the family could go to court to prove the child's paternity. If the young man refused to take the paternity test, the court would, ipso facto, recognize him as the child's father. The Director stated that the solution could also vary depending on the family and its values regarding pre-marital sex.

The following information was provided in a 30 January 2007 telephone interview with an assistant professor at the University of Guelph whose specialties include women and politics in Egypt. The professor indicated that the consequences of an out-of-marriage pregnancy can vary depending on the family's social class, the code of honour of the "tribe," geographical location and the family's values. She stated that, in the most extreme cases, the family may kill the young woman and her child. In other cases, family members could demand that their daughter marry the young man, even if the family does not accept him.

The professor indicated that abortion is not an option in some Muslim families. However, Muslim families whose code of honour is very strong could impose a secret abortion to hide the pregnancy. The family could also choose to isolate their daughter for the nine months of the pregnancy, after which the child would be taken away.

According to the professor, the family and the community would consider the birth of a child outside marriage shameful. Therefore, the mother could, for example, abort the child, get married, put the child up for adoption or run away with the young man in order to avoid that situation for her and her child. The professor stated that the mother's choice could also vary depending on her situation and social class.

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

References

Egyptian Center for Human Rights (ECWR). 22 January 2007. Telephone interview with the Director.

_____. N.d. "About us." <<http://www.ecwronline.org/english/abotus/index.htm>> [Accessed 22 January 2007]

Assistant professor, University of Guelph. 30 January 2007. Telephone interview.

Additional Sources Consulted

Oral sources: Concordia University, the National Council for Women, the Suzanne Mubarak Women's International Peace Movement, Oxfam Novib, the United Nations Development Program in Egypt, the Arab Network for NGOs, the National Association for Human Rights and Development, the Cynthia Nelson Institute for Gender and Women's Studies and the Social Research Center of the American University in Cairo, the Alliance for Arab Women, the Association for Women Solidarity, the Egyptian Organization for Human Rights, and the Association défense et promotion des droits des femmes did not provide any information within the time constraints for this response.

Internet sites, including: Arab Network for NGOs; Family Health International (FHI); National Council for Women; Oxfam; Social Fund for Development; the Suzanne Mubarak Women's International Peace Movement; the Women's Learning Partnership for Rights, Development, and Peace; United Nations Development Program in Egypt.

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